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ABSTRACT

A review of the literature on school reform and successful restructuring efforts, with a focus on the decentralization of the Chicago public school system, is the purpose of this paper. Under new legislation, the Chicago Board of Education will be disbanded to encourage citizen control of schools, and will be replaced by a system of individual schools with elected governing councils. Recommendations are made for implementing increased citizen and teacher input in the decision-making process. An extensive bibliography is included. (33 references) (LMI)

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WHAT RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT SCHOOL REFORM, SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND TEACHER INVOLVEMENT

Effie McHenry

School reform has been an issue since the beginning of the public school movement in the Nineteenth Century. The National Commission on Excellence started the education reform of the 1980s by publishing A Nation at Risk (Goldberg, 1983). This book conveyed two negative messages concerning the central importance of education to the well-being of our nation, our loss in our once unchallenged lead in scientific technological innovations, and the norm of mediocrity in American education. The positive message of the Commission was that we do not have to condone mediocrity. The Commission made broad recommendations in areas of content, standards and expectations, time, teaching, leadership, and fiscal support. After analyzing the results of the National polls, the Commission's authors believe that the best tool for improving education is to support the needs of the public. The Commission's report clearly touched the American consciousness which governs the hopes, aspirations, and apprehensions of Americans about the future well-being of their children, their schools, and their society. The task before us then and now is the creation of a learning society.

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After the 1987 Chicago teachers strike, the Mayor's Education Summit, under the leadership of the late Mayor Harold Washington, combined with other civic and advocacy organizations to form the Chicago Partnership. The Chicago Partnership was instrumental in getting Senate Bill 1840 passed. This Bill was designed to restructure the Chicago Public School System. Therefore, there is a need to know how teachers feel about school reform in that they and their students will be affected by its implementation. The data would be of importance to teachers, school administrators, local school councils, state legislators, and the general public.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The widely publicized reforms in American education have arisen from the responses to conditions and events of our nation, with little connection to education. An economic depression or recession has often stimulated criticism and demands for reform as in 1882, 1912, and the Great Depression of the 1930s. When events seem to change America's self-esteem, there is a barrage of school criticism and a demand for reform. Since most reform movements of the past have been driven by events not directly related to schools, movement leaders have not had reliable information about the actual achievement of education. The public has come to believe that there is something seriously wrong with our schools when our

political and educational leaders establish committees or commissions to propose solutions to the alleged problems. These reform proposals have reflected the ideas of the members and the suggestions of special interest groups. Little consideration has been given to evidence that a proposal is practicable and will accomplish what it claims (Tyler, 1988).

The reform of primary and secondary public schools in America has been an issue since the beginning of the public school movement. There are some fascinating parallels between the Committee of Ten Report of 1893 and the recent National Commission Report of American Education (Edson, 1984). The National Commission on Excellence report, A Nation at Risk, started the educational reform of the 1980s (Futrell, 1989). The Commission challenged the nation's well-being by conveying the messages that the norm of our schools was mediocrity and that our nation no longer leads in scientific technological advances. Another message conveyed by the Commission was that we do not have to put up with mediocrity; we can do better, we should do better, and we must do better. The Commission also made broad recommendations in areas of content, standards and expectations, time, teaching, leadership, and fiscal support (Futrell, 1989).

By the fall of 1983, most educational reform centered largely on such matters as the status and compensation of

the teachers and the high school graduation requirements (Ravitch, 1984). The various task forces and national commissions stated that our educational systems must make all the young people culturally and scientifically literate. Since we have never tried to eliminate mass illiteracy, we should be aware of what has gone astray in the past. At one extreme, the traditionals have been content to educate those at the top without regard for the welfare of the minority students. At the other extreme, the progressives have divided and diluted the curriculum, which left the majority with an inadequate education. Since pedagogical practice follows educational philosophy, no nationally coherent educational philosophy capable of changing "fashions" in educational thought has been recommended (Ravitch, 1984).

Reformers, who had little understanding of the schools, could not be left to lead the reform movement. Educational reformers met with success when the reforms were focused on real problems and employed carefully developed plans for attacking the problems. Educators used the call for reforms to generate local well-focused reform plans. Improvement in educational effectiveness of a given school depended largely on the efforts of school personnel and parents. These people set in motion a significant "reform movement" that yielded constructive outcomes by identifying school problems and seeking effective solutions (Tyler, 1988).

Education initiatives spread quickly from state to state in the 1980s. During this period, state legislators introduced unsurpassed numbers of education-related bills, increased state aid, and examined the findings of hundreds of state-level task forces and commissions. The level of state policy activity in education has not been higher since the formation of the common school system (Firestere, Fuhrman & Kirst, 1989). The highest level of state activity was to mandate more academic courses and upgrade teaching through changes in certification and comprehensive student testing and graduation requirements. The states rejected complicated reforms such as lengthening the school day and year while ignoring state reform cohesive packages. A glaring example of reform conflict was in teacher certification. By instituting tougher certification requirements, the teacher pool was reduced (LoGerfo, 1984). Most states were not exhibiting a clear shift in direction from the first wave of reform which concentrated on establishing minimum competency standards for the teachers and students to the second wave of restructuring instruction by increasing in-depth learning, higher order thinking and school governance (Futrell, 1989).

Only modest success in achieving the educational goals expressed in A Nation at Risk have been met. The reform policies of the 1980s represented the first steps in a long-term improvement process. Educational reforms in this

nation have been marked by too many changes. The only meaningful reform should be improved quality of instruction for all students. Strategies should be developed for providing better teacher education by improving instruction and academic content. The reformers need to match policies to problems (Elmore, 1988). Although students at the top two-thirds of the achievement band generally benefit from curricular intensification or raised graduation requirements, lower achievers may need strategies beyond curricular intensification. Reform policies need to be coordinated; especially when both school restructuring and curricular intensification are pursued. For example, staff development offered by states, district teacher organizations, regional agencies. or universities must be coordinated with curriculum revisions and new roles and responsibilities.

These waves of school reforms have been prominently and persistently featured on state and national agendas as were the educational reforms after Sputnick. Education improvement has been high on the agendas of governors, the Carnegie Foundation, other foundations, business groups, and teachers unions. The educational reform movement has manifested in the intensity of policy action. In fact, nationwide, more than 700 state statutes affecting some aspects of the teaching profession were enacted between 1984 and 1986 (Timar, 1989).

The school reform movement has created a whole new body of rules for administrators, professionals, and students. With all the new rules being manifested, the reform movement has lost sight of the goals of reform: improving the quality of schooling in America. In assessing the national efforts to reform the schools, policy researchers must recognize the importance of the organizational culture of individual schools. We have learned from school reform efforts that reform must focus on improving the health and competency of schools as organizations. The quality of education will not improve if reforms further complicate life in the schools. It will be harder for schools to do their work if policies further fragment the schools. In order to develop successful reform strategies, there must be an integration of the three dimensions of reform: Authorized, which defined the state interests, expectations, and allocations; localist, which defined implementation and practice; and conversation reform, which influences the professional organizations of teachers and administrators, and the professional norms developed by teachers.

Effective schools have a sense of organizational coherence and purpose. In order to achieve this goal, major restructuring is required. Teachers must be socialized to assume broader responsibilities. They must participate in decision making, planning, goal setting, and problem solving if educational excellence is to be achieved. Educational

excellence cannot be achieved in the absence of sound healthy institutions in which education can flourish (Metropolitan Life Survey, 1985).

In order for policies designed to reform education to be effective, schools must implement them. States must create a context in which organizational competence can be developed at the school level if they are serious about improving the quality of education and striving toward excellence. The local schools must work with the state to develop a cooperative effort aimed at enhancing the organizational and institutional effectiveness of the school (Timar, 1989).

The primary function of school was learning, which included academic achievement and the acquisition of the chief tenets of the Western cultural tradition. Although our nation was the first among the world's nations in the commitment of resources to education, our graduates rank well below many nations in most standard academic disciplines. The most important success of our nation's schools in recent decades has been accessibility. However, this period of increased access has not been marked by any noticeable increase in productivity (Shapiro, 1988).

The only standard of performance that can sustain a democracy dedicated to equal opportunity is actual achievement. Our investment in our children and their education is a gift to them and their future. We must not hesitate to support our schools fully as centers of learning and as our hope for the future (Smith, 1988).

Educators and proponents of school reform do not always see eye to eye about the roles of educators and schools in our society. In order to establish a common mission, these two groups must unite to form a common path toward educational excellence. The goals of academic excellence must promote the challenge to provide individualism and demonstrate our care by nourishing students with knowledge. These goals are to produce thoughtful, well-informed students. The schools must provide opportunities for all (Haas, 1989).

The chief interest in the schools of most people is that the graduates can be relied upon to help maintain a high standard of living and help maintain viable political and social institutions. Educators must listen carefully to the society we serve. As Socrates discovered, teachers serve at the pleasure of the society. The current reform literature is a striking consistent statement of society's preserved need (Haas, 1989). Educators should adopt this agenda by helping to refine it and implement it in the classrooms and laboratories where we are the experts. The desire for students to be all they can be in their subsequent lives is the common ground that supports educators and reforms alike. The issue is the future and how we prepare for it. Although formal schooling is just a part of the preparation needed, it is a part that greatly enhances individual freedom. The more we know, the more choices we have.

To foster educational excellence, a complex mixture of cultural and institutional factors must be fostered. Reform policies must create the kinds of institutional arrangements and organizational structure that promote educational excellence. Reform policies must create a sense of coherence and direction for our schools. All schools must set a certain tone that is created by individuals working in the schools and not by bureaucratic mandates that emanate from distant places. The responsibility for excellence must reside in the schools and not in the state legislatures (Firestere, Fuhrman & Kirst, 1989).

The role of the state legislatures should be targeted at strengthening schools as organizations. The state is expected to establish professional standards and expectations, provide support and nurture organizational characteristics that foster excellence. Just as the states regulate the medical, legal, and other professions without presuming to tell lawyers how many cases to win or doctors what medication to prescribe to patients, so states must regulate the teaching profession without intruding into the process of teaching. State policymakers must focus their attention on making schools better places in which to work if high-quality educational programs are to exist. Present reforms must heed the lessons of the past that institutional culture cannot be circumvented. There must be clear delineation of authority and responsibility between the

state level policymakers and the teaching professionals (Timar, 1989).

Schools must exercise authority by affirming the fundamental worth of education in everything we do in order to rebuild their institutional coherence. The authority of the school must be predicated on the belief that there is a body of knowledge worth teaching. The schools must be structured to form the organizational and intellectual base for that belief (Timar, 1989).

Underlying much of the current flurry of reform activity is the assumption that teachers' lackluster performance in no small way accounts for the inadequacy of school learning (Rosenholtz, 1987). However, there is already a shortage of qualified teachers and the intellectual level of new recruits is considerably lower than a decade ago (Schlechty and Vance, 1983). Policymakers have a Herculean task of making changes to improve the quality of the teaching force. Unless ways are found to reward those who teach with a sense of worth for their efforts, the schools will face the danger of being in worse shape than before school reform began (Bencizenga, 1985).

Dedicated, concerned and creative teachers must take charge of their destinies and help those who are responsible for educational reforms. Teachers must seek greater empowerment by asserting their desire to assume responsibility for improving schools. Academic integrity

must be returned to the curriculum. Teachers must recognize and accept their professional responsibilities; and, at the same time, they must respond to the parents' concerns about the education of children (Hadeed, 1984).

The major lesson learned from the educational reform measures and school improvement efforts is that educational change of almost any stripe is the problem of the smallest unit. It is this problem that turns on the incentives, attitudes, abilities, and responses of those ultimately responsible for seeing that initiatives for improvement are translated into improved educational services. Improved education in the schools is all about teachers teaching in the classrooms. The classroom teachers determine the eventual results of reform policies. Consequently, the spate of present policies that take direct aim at the competence of the teaching force must be assessed against the reality of the task. This reality encompasses the context within which teachers teach, the incentives to promote professional growth and commitment to a teaching career, and the factors that affect a teacher's ability to respond to incentives, to develop professionally, and to aspire to excellence in classroom practices (McLaughlin, 1984).

Schools must become centers of change and not targets of change. Schools can serve as centers of inquiry activities instead of importing knowledge from outside the schools. Educators should be at the center of the process

of generating and using knowledge. If we expect to see awareness translated into action, we must recognize the need to involve educators at school sites in developing their own understandings. Since inquiry is not value-free, it is important that new views grow out of the values found in a specific school. Regardless of where and how knowledge is generated, individuals must fit this knowledge in the context of value-based human activities. Decision making and renewal must focus in the individual school. At the heart of the beliefs and attitudes that drive individual schools are the values that individuals within the schools share. For the schools to be effective, the leaders of the schools must use participative decision making that takes advantage of the knowledge and skill of all members. Ideally, this leadership will come from the collaboration of the principal, teachers, parents, district staff or university faculty members. The ultimate power to change is and always has been in the heads, hands, and hearts of the educators who work in the schools (Sirotnik and Clark, 1988). Decisions must be made where the action is.

Teachers have the reputation of resisting change. Educational change depends on what teachers do and think (Fullan, 1982). If changes are to be successful, the initiators must understand how the school culture will accept the proposed innovations.

The attitudes of teachers toward change and subsequent improvements in classroom teaching was analyzed (Sparks, 1988). Nonimproving teachers tended to maintain their styles of teaching, to attempt few changes, and to have low expectations for themselves and their students. Staff developers need to attend to philosophical acceptance, self-efficacy, and the importance of suggested practices during inservice training.

Teachers do not see reform measures as the answer to their problems or to their dissatisfactions with their profession (Wangberg, 1987). According to a Harris poll taken in 1985, 65% of the teachers felt that school reform had been implemented without their consent and 61% felt the reforms were built on the administrator's view. Also, the poll revealed that one out of four elementary and secondary school teachers will quit teaching within the next five years and 40% of the teachers would not choose teaching as their profession. Teachers continue to "cite" satisfactions gained from working with students as the reason for continuing to teach. Teachers are becoming demoralized because decision making regarding our schools is becoming farther and farther removed from the teachers.

Hess (1989) did a survey on the attitudes of Chicago teachers toward school reform. The findings indicated that Chicago teachers did not expect great improvements in student achievement and school climate. They were less than confident about how reform would affect teacher morale,

professionalism, and teacher autonomy. The teachers regarded increased parental involvement as the chief outcome of school reform although the teachers expressed fears about possible interference from parents who were unfamiliar with educational issues. The better informed teachers were both more likely to be involved and were more optimistic about the outcomes of school reform. The survey highlighted the continued need for training of teachers as well as for parents and community members and the inclusion of all groups with important roles in educating children.

Chicago public school teachers are not entrusting their own children to the Chicago Public School System. Forty-six percent of the children of Chicago Public School teachers who live in the city attend private schools compared to only 22% of all school-age children in Chicago (Chicago Tribune, 1984). These teachers, who know it best, are not willing to risk their children's futures in such an ineffective system.

Even though the citizens who were polled reported overall satisfaction with Illinois schools, they graded the Chicago Public Schools in the range of C- to D+ (Walberg and Hess, 1985). The decline of the Chicago Public Schools was caused by three factors: barriers to parental participation, the growth of a large bureaucracy, and the absence of accountability (Walberg, 1988). These factors were the outcomes of specific reasons: centralized

administration which closed off many avenues for parental involvement in the schools; the absence of a bottom-line and presence of the perverse incentive structure for the schools where the result of failing to perform well would receive increased funding the following year; the tendency of public employees to out-organize parents and community members because public school employees are better able to lobby for spending increases and policy decisions they support than are parents; and the practice of geographic assigning students to schools.

Increased spending does not lead to effective schools. Over and over again, researchers have found that higher teacher salaries and smaller class sizes have not lead to better educational results (Bridges and Glass, 1979 and 1982). Even though Catholic schools and public schools in Chicago teach children from the same socioeconomic background, they produce dramatically different results. The children enrolled in Catholic high schools advance up to two grade levels for every one level of advancement by students enrolled in neighborhood public schools. Since the parents are free to withdraw their children from the Catholic schools if they are dissatisfied, the schools are naturally more accountable to parents. Because the Catholic schools are smaller and the parents are better organized, the imbalance between organized school employees and unorganized parents is more pronounced and damaging.

Violence, dropout rates, drug abuse, and teenage pregnancy are symptoms of a school system too big for adequate supervision of troubled students and a community that lacks effective methods of intervention. Although Chicago is not the only city in the United States with a public school system that is failing to produce acceptable results, the Chicago Public Schools must accept the responsibility of their failures and work toward rectifying their results.

According to the C.U.R.E. Plan, the Chicago Public Schools would be "debureaucratized". The focus of the C.U.R.E. Plan is the individual school. The responsible principal and an elected School Governing Council, consisting of nineteen members, six of whom are parents of children enrolled in the local CPS, six adult community members without children enrolled in the local CPS, and six teachers and the principal, would make important decisions that directly affect learning at the local school (Walberg, 1988). Since the councils will have power over hiring and firing of principals and teachers, the allocation of money and the estabishment of curriculum, accountability is created at the level closest to the student, parent, and taxpayer. Concerned citizens and parents would have the opportunity to shape directly the lives of the children at the local public school. The C.U.R.E. Plan would allow teachers the opportunity to effect and help shape the educational program of their schools.

Although the C.U.R.E. Plan encourages teacher participation, teachers will not be able to control School Governing Councils because they are given only one-third of the votes on the body. The parents and the community members will control the remaining two-thirds. The C.U.R.E. Plan would empower the people in the city to control the school they own. The School Governing Councils would have a voice in tailoring curriculum to their communities' interests and needs: the delivery of expenditure of funds for individual schools.

Although there is no simple solutions to our present educational crisis, renewed commitment followed by policies and programs that encourage greater respect and support for teachers, improved working conditions, and improved rewards should reestablish teaching as a profession. However, while haste is needed, we must realize the complexity of the problem. With substantial input from our teachers, we can develop real answers to the problems we face in the teaching profession today. Clearly, if we wish to improve urban education, special priority must be given to the frustrations of teachers. We must make a commitment to bettering the working conditions for teachers such as involving them in school governance (Tewel, 1988).

Edmonds (1979) identified schools where academic achievement seemed to be independent of pupils' social class and he concluded that effective schools had an outstanding

principal, high expectations for all students, an orderly atmosphere, a regular testing program, and emphasis on academic learning (Ravitch, 1984). Student Achievement practices such as more "time on task" were emphasized. All American schools should have what effective schools have in common: a strong academic program, a principal with a vision and the courage to work for it, dedicated teachers with commitment to teaching and students' learning, a mix of students from different backgrounds, and high expectations for all students. If true reform in education is to occur, states must address the quality of leadership in the schools (Johnson, 1985).

Today's educational reforms will succeed if greater numbers of eager children and adolescents explore topics about which they become excited, learn things they wish to share with others, and find intrinsic rewards in learning (Barth, 1986). However, today's educational reform will fail if it discourages teachers from taking time to "seize the moment", encourages them to devote more time to drilling for standarized tests, and influences students to work more diligently for grades and test scores. Teachers must accept the challenge of reform to use their creative abilities in more effective and challenging ways. They must take this current climate of reform despite the obvious difficulties that hinder their best efforts such as young people who have serious emotional needs that prevent them

from giving attention to educational tasks; young people coming from homes where there is little support for education; mounting curricular requirements; administrators who discourage; excessive paperwork; and on and on. Teachers must let others know when they succeed despite these odds. These success stories need to be told so that fine teachers can receive the recognition they deserve and so that their efforts can inspire others who are not living up to the challenge the profession offers them (Levine, 1985).

Effective teachers must have the courage to take the time to do what they believe must be done. They must construe criticism as support for positive action. They must look on demands for change as a mandate to create more meaningful learning opportunities. They must be convinced that the changes they make will create excitement in their students and themselves, which will result in better-motivated and higher achieving students. They must insist that measures of success will go beyond standardized testing. Teachers must let educational reformers know the changes that will meet the needs of young people in today's schools. Teachers need to organize themselves in leadership teams that focus their efforts on one primary objective: to make the school a better place for children (Nelson, 1989).

In every Illinois District except Chicago, local control of schools is the norm. The division-of-powers idea has worked well to limit centralized power and devolve

authority to small units that enhance local preference (Lane, 1989). Local choice prevailed for 200 years before the advent of centralized public schools and compulsory attendance laws. Under new legislation, the Chicago Board will be disbanded to encourage citizen control. The most important decision will be made by elected school governing councils at the most devolved level: the individual school. The fondest hope is that new legislation will improve the education and life prospects of the Chicago children. If the Chicago schools are successfully reconstructed, the educational experiences of these children will be enriched and, in turn, the metropolitan community will be enriched by their productivity as adults.

The literature reveals many different attitudes and ideas regarding school reform. It appears that in some states where school reform measures have been mandated by state legislatures, the majority of the teachers' opinions are favorable, but the general theme of pros and cons appears. Since the school reforms in Chicago appear extreme, the whole nation is watching Chicago. These ideas seem to be of universal concern and are basic issues for further study.

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